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ABSTRACT

This booklet examines the issue of trust within the context of school improvement. Specifically, it looks at teacher-teacher and teacher-principal relationships. Drawing on existing research and the experiences of individual schools, it offers a summary of current literature and identifies specific steps that educators can take to increase the level of trust in their schools. It discusses in some detail the following topics: (1) the key components of trust, which are benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness; (2) what the research says about trust; (3) the obstacles to building and maintaining trust in schools; (4) building trust between principals and teachers; and (5) building trust among teachers. Included in the booklet are profiles of 2 schools working on school improvement, summaries of 6 research projects on trust in schools, a list of additional resources, and 30 references. (WFA)

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BUILDING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT:

Implications for Principals and Teachers

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BUILDING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT:

Implications for Principals and Teachers

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OFFICE OF PLANNING AND SERVICE COORDINATION

SEPTEMBER 2003

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

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FOREWORD

This booklet is one in a series of "hot topics" reports produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. These reports briefly address current educational concerns and issues as indicated by requests for information that come to the Laboratory from the Northwest region and beyond. Each booklet contains a discussion of research and literature pertinent to the issue, how Northwest schools and programs are addressing the issue, selected resources, and contact information.

One objective of the series is to foster a sense of community and connection among educators. Another is to increase awareness of current education-related themes and concerns. Each booklet gives practitioners a glimpse of how fellow educators from around the Northwest are addressing issues, overcoming obstacles, and attaining success. The goal of the series is to give educators current, reliable, and useful information on topics that are important to them.

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INTRODUCTION

Skim through the literature on school reform, and words like "trust," "respect," "collegiality," and "buy-in" appear again and again (Maeroff, 1993; Royal & Rossi, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1992). But while it seems to be generally assumed that trust is a core criterion of successful school improvement efforts, few publications address the issue explicitly or examine it in much depth.

Part of the problem, no doubt, is the fuzzy nature of the word "trust." Although most of us can easily identify relationships in which trust is or is not present, pinning down precisely what trust entails is harder to do. From the perspective of educational researchers, the level of trust present within a school is a difficult thing to measure, much less connect to concrete outcomes such as teacher retention, parent involvement, or student performance on standardized tests. While it may be clear, intuitively, that trust "matters," questions about why and how are not so easily addressed.

This booklet examines the issue of trust within the context of school improvement, looking specifically at teacher-teacher and teacher-principal relationships. Drawing on existing research as well as the experiences of individual schools, we offer a summary of current literature, discuss common roadblocks to trust-building, and identify specific steps that educators can take to increase the level of trust in their schools. A second booklet, to be published in December, will revisit the issue of trust as it relates to strengthening relationships among schools, students, and families.

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IN CONTEXT

As schools across the country face ongoing pressure to raise test scores and bring all students up to high standards, increased attention is being paid to the conditions under which school improvement efforts are likely to take hold and prove effective over the long term. Nowhere is this more true than in low-performing, high-poverty urban districts—the schools that have, in general, demonstrated the least success in raising student achievement and carrying out meaningful, long-lasting reforms.

In examining the characteristics of struggling schools that have made significant gains, researchers have verified what most educators already know to be true: the quality of the relationships within a school community makes a difference. "In schools that are improving, where trust and cooperative adult efforts are strong, students report that they feel safe, sense that teachers care about them, and experience greater academic challenge. In contrast, in schools with flat or declining test scores, teachers are more likely to state that they do not trust one another" (Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

Relationships among teachers and principals, in particular, are being held out as important indicators of a school's or district's readiness for reform and ability to sustain it. The U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive School Reform Program (CSR), for example, emphasizes that if improvement efforts are to be successful over the long term, school leaders must first build a solid foundation for school-wide reform. Such foundations are characterized by trust among school members, collegial relationships, and widespread buy-in and support, as well as a shared vision for

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change (Hale, 2000; Keirstead, 1999). The High Performance Learning Community Project (HPLC) model funded by the U.S. Department of Education similarly identifies a school's level of buy-in for a reform strategy as a critical component of "implementation capacity," the "skills, habits of mind, and organizational culture needed to consistently and effectively bring about improvement on an ongoing basis..." (Geiser & Berman, 2000).

Still, the questions remain: What is "trust," exactly? How is it connected to school improvement, and how can it be built and maintained?

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KEY COMPONENTS OF TRUST

In general terms, trust relationships involve risk, reliability, vulnerability, and expectation (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Young, 1998). If there is nothing at stake, or if one party does not require anything of the other, trust is not an issue. In school settings, however, risk and expectations abound. Staff and students alike are constantly put in positions in which they are not only expected to perform certain duties but in which their well-being depends upon others fulfilling certain obligations, as well. As researchers Bryk and Schneider (2003) explain,

> Distinct role relationships characterize the social exchanges of schooling: teachers with students, teachers with other teachers, teachers with parents, and all groups with the school principal. Each party in a relationship maintains an understanding of his or her role's obligations and holds some expectations about the obligations of the other parties. For a school community to work well, it must achieve agreement in each role relationship in terms of the understandings held about these personal obligations and expectations of others (p. 41).

A more precise definition of trust, drawn from Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (1998) comprehensive review of the literature includes five key components commonly used to measure trustworthiness:

Benevolence: Having confidence that another party has your best interests at heart and will protect your interests is a key ingredient of trust.

Reliability: Reliability refers to the extent to which you can depend upon another party to come through for you, to act consistently, and to follow through.

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Competence: Similar to reliability, competence has to do with belief in another party's ability to perform the tasks required by his or her position. For example, if a principal means well but lacks necessary leadership skills, he or she is not likely to be trusted to do the job.

Honesty: A person's integrity, character, and authenticity are all dimensions of trust. The degree to which a person can be counted on to represent situations fairly makes a huge difference in whether or not he or she is trusted by others in the school community.

Openness: Judgments about openness have to do with how freely another party shares information with others. Guarded communication, for instance, provokes distrust because people wonder what is being withheld and why. Openness is crucial to the development of trust between supervisors and subordinates, particularly in times of increased vulnerability for staff.

"In the absence of prior contact with a person or institution," add Bryk and Schneider (2003), "participants may rely on the general reputation of the other and also on commonalities of race, gender, age, religion, or upbringing" to assess how trustworthy they are (pp. 41–42). The more interaction the parties have over time, however, the more their willingness to trust one another is based upon the other party's actions and their perceptions of one another's intentions, competence, and integrity.

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WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

To date, few large-scale studies have focused specifically on teacher-principal or teacher-teacher trust in relation to school improvement and student learning. Much of the available research consists of single-school or single-district studies that do not sufficiently control for other factors likely to influence changes in school performance. Trust remains a difficult quantity to measure, let alone link causally to concrete outcomes such as scores on standardized tests.

Perhaps the largest and best-known current study of trust in schools is Bryk and Schneider's 2002 analysis of the relationships between trust and student achievement. *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement* discusses their 10-year study of more than 400 Chicago elementary schools. Findings are based on case study data as well as surveys of teachers, principals, and students conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. A series of Hierarchical Multivariate Linear Model analyses were used to control for other factors that might also affect changes in student achievement.

By analyzing the relationship between a school productivity trend indicator and periodic survey reports, Bryk and Schneider were able to establish a connection between the level of trust in a school and student learning. While they are careful to clarify that trust in and of itself does not directly affect student learning, they did find that "trust fosters a set of organizational conditions, some structural and others social-psychological, that make it more conducive for individuals to initiate and sustain the kinds of activities nec-

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essary to affect productivity improvements" (p. 116). This occurs in four broad ways:

- Trust among educators lowers their sense of vulnerability as they engage in "the new and uncertain tasks associated with reform."
- Trust "facilitates public problem-solving within an organization."
- Trust "undergirds the highly efficient system of social control found in a school-based professional community" (p. 116). Staff members understand their own and others' roles and obligations as part of the school community and need minimal supervision or external pressure in order to carry them out.
- Trust "sustains an ethical imperative ... to advance the best interests of children," and thus "constitutes a moral resource for school improvement" (p. 34).

In short, Bryk and Schneider's work indicates that while trust alone does not guarantee success, schools with little or no trust have almost no chance of improving. Other noteworthy findings of their study are that trust among teachers is more likely to develop in small schools with 350 or fewer students, that the stability of the school population increases the likelihood of trust, and that trust is more likely to be found when teachers and parents have had some degree of choice between schools. In other words, "voluntary association" is more likely to lead to trusting relationships than situations in which teachers and students are simply assigned by administrators or district policies to particular schools.

Two other researchers who have published extensively on the issue of trust in schools are Wayne K. Hoy and Megan

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Tschannen-Moran. They developed a Trust Scale to measure the level of trust in schools and examined the interrelationships of faculty trust in students, teachers, principals, and parents (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The scale was developed in a number of phases: the development of items to measure facets of trust; a check of content validity with an expert panel; a field test with teachers; and a pilot study with 50 teachers in 50 different schools from five states.

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's Trust Scales were subsequently used and tested in three additional large-scale studies, drawing on 97 Ohio high schools, 64 Virginia middle schools, and 143 Ohio elementary schools. Findings suggested that when there was a greater perceived level of trust in a school, teachers had a greater sense of efficacy—the belief in their ability to affect actions leading to success. Trust tended to be pervasive: when teachers trusted their principal, they also were more likely to trust staff, parents, and students. The studies also suggested that faculty trust in parents predicted a strong degree of parent-teacher collaboration. These results have been used to develop a self-assessment tool for schools to measure levels of teacher trust in the principal, their colleagues, students, and parents, as well as levels of principal trust in teachers, students, and parents.

Tschannen-Moran (2001) also conducted a study in which she examined relationships between the level of collaboration in a school and the level of trust. The results indicate a significant link between teachers' collaboration with the principal and their trust in the principal, collaboration with colleagues and trust in colleagues, and collaboration with parents and trust in parents. If collaboration is an "impor-

tant mechanism" for finding solutions to problems, trust will be necessary for schools "to reap the benefits of greater collaboration" (p. 327).

As with the connection between increased educator trust and student achievement, the relationship between trust and collaboration is not one of simple cause and effect. Instead, it would appear that trust and collaboration are mutually reinforcing: the more parties work together, the greater opportunity they have to get to know one another and build trust. At the same time, as Tschannen-Moran's (2001) study indicates, the level of trust already present in the relationship influences parties' willingness and ability to work together. The greater the trust between teachers and principals, the more likely it is that true collaboration will occur.

For a summary of other relevant studies on trust in schools, as well as links to the Trust Scales for teachers and principals, see the Appendix and Resources sections.

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THE ROADBLOCKS: OBSTACLES TO BUILDING AND MAINTAINING TRUST IN SCHOOLS

Building trust between educators—whether teacher to teacher or teacher to administrator—is rarely a simple matter. Obstacles to trust are, unfortunately, easy to come by, particularly in schools that have experienced high turnover in school leadership, repeated layoffs and budget shortfalls, and/or widespread differences of opinion regarding curricula, teaching practices, school policies, or other matters affecting students, faculty, and staff. Unfavorable media coverage can also fan the flames of mistrust, pitting teachers against administrators or representing conflicts within the school community in less than productive ways.

While there are probably endless grievances we could list here that have led to low levels of trust in different schools, the most common barriers to developing and maintaining trusting relationships among teachers, principals, and other school staff members include the following:

- Top-down decisionmaking that is perceived as arbitrary, misinformed, or not in the best interests of the school
- Ineffective communication
- Lack of follow-through on or support for school improvement efforts and other projects
- Unstable or inadequate school funding
- Failure to remove teachers or principals who are widely viewed to be ineffective
- Frequent turnover in school leadership

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- High teacher turnover
- Teacher isolation

Perhaps the greatest obstacle that schools experiencing a lack of trust must overcome, however, is their past. Identifying the specific causes of mistrust in the school and making a sincere commitment to address them is the first and probably most important step.

BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

How staff members in a given school set about increasing the level of trust between principals and teachers will depend to a great degree upon individual circumstances: school size, stability, history, existing relationships among faculty and administrators, and so on. Listed below are some general suggestions from researchers, professors of education, and practitioners for laying a foundation for teacher-principal trust.

Demonstrate personal integrity. First and foremost, highly regarded principals demonstrate honesty and commitment to follow through—in all interactions with faculty, support staff, parents, and students (Barlow, 2001; Blase & Blase, 2001; Sebring & Bryk, 2000). Although teachers' honesty and integrity in interactions with the principal are important, too, it is the responsibility of the principal—the person with more power in the relationship—to set the stage for trusting relationships with teachers and other school staff.

Show that you care. Trusted and respected principals take "a personal interest in the well-being of others": teachers, students, their families, and other members of the larger school community (Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

Be accessible. Principals earn trust from members of the school community by encouraging open communication and actively making themselves available to teachers, parents, students, and staff (Black, 1997; Blase & Blase, 2001; Sebring & Bryk, 2000). Barlow (2001) argues, "Once the leader takes the risk of being open, others are more likely to take a similar risk—and thereby take the first steps necessary to building a culture of trust" (p. 26).

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Facilitate and model effective communication. Ineffective communication, including individuals' inability or unwillingness to listen to what others have to say, is a sure way to "confound problem solving, reduce trust, and magnify feelings of isolation among administrators, teachers, and support personnel" (Blase & Blase, 2001, p. 25). As Lambert (1998) notes, "Trust is built and experienced within the context of multifaceted communication systems.... A communication system needs to be open and fluid, include feedback loops, and be practiced by everyone in the school" (pp. 79–80).

Involve staff in decisionmaking. Facilitate authentic participation by asking for the input of those affected by decisions, providing background information necessary for staff to weigh in on decisions, and treating teachers as capable professionals whose insights are valuable (Black, 1997; Blase & Blase, 2001).

Celebrate experimentation and support risk. Give teachers room to try new things and to make mistakes. Supporting innovation and risk taking demonstrates respect for teachers as learners and as professionals whose judgment can be trusted (Blase & Blase, 2001). "Trusted principals," Barlow (2001) notes, "empower teachers and draw out the best in them" (p. 31).

Express value for dissenting views. Being able to express concerns and disagreement without fear of reprisal is essential to building trusting relationships (Lien, Johnson, & Ragland, 1997). Blase and Blase (2001) advise principals to "welcome and embrace conflict as a way to produce substantive, positive outcomes over the long run. Regarding conflict as potentially constructive helps build supportive human relationships because it allows us to deal with our differ-

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ences in win-win ways" (p. 29). It also allows teachers to feel more secure in providing honest input and participating meaningfully in school decisionmaking.

Reduce teachers' sense of vulnerability. Bryk and Schneider (2002) remind school leaders, "As public criticism focuses on schools' inadequacies, teachers need to know that their principal values their efforts and senses their good intentions" (p. 129). A core element of this is demonstrating, through both words and action, that "teachers can and should be trusted to do what is best for students" (p. 33). In environments in which teachers feel unsupported, mistrusted, or constantly on the verge of reprimand, trust between teachers and administrators is unlikely to improve.

Ensure that teachers have basic resources. When teachers know that the principal can be depended upon to provide necessary books and supplies—and to do it in a timely fashion—trust in that person as a responsible leader grows (Kratzer, 1997; Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

Be prepared to replace ineffective teachers. This final suggestion is offered as a last resort, and warrants a strong word of caution. Removing a staff member, particularly if it is done unprofessionally, without warning, or without clear cause, holds great potential to damage a principal's relationship with teachers and lower the level of trust in the school. However, there may be situations in which taking action to replace ineffective staff members with strong teachers who support the school's mission is necessary. A principal's unwillingness or inability to remove teachers who are widely regarded as incompetent is likely to undermine his or her trust with other staff members (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

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BUILDING TRUST AMONG TEACHERS

While most of the above suggestions have been framed in terms of what principals and other administrators can do, teachers' role in developing trust with administrators should not be overlooked. Clearly, teachers' levels of receptivity to and support for principals' efforts to improve trust make a difference in how effective they can be.

The responsibility for building trust among teachers falls on the shoulders of principals and teachers alike. Principals can—and should—take an active role in creating the necessary conditions for teacher relationships that are both collegial and congenial (Sergiovanni, 1992). According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998), however, "the behavior of teachers is the primary influence on trust in colleagues" (pp. 348–349). If relationships between teachers are to change significantly, teachers themselves must work to identify barriers to trust within the faculty and take the initiative to improve, repair, and maintain relationships. Some places to begin:

Engage the full faculty in activities and discussions related to the school's mission, vision, and core values. According to Bryk and Schneider (2002), "trust within a faculty is grounded in common understandings about what students should learn, how instruction should be conducted, and how teachers and students should behave with one another. For teachers to sense integrity among colleagues, a faculty must not only share these views but also perceive that the actions taken by other teachers are consistent with them" (p. 130).

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Make new teachers feel welcome. In the busy first few weeks of a school year, it is not uncommon for new teachers to be overlooked (Gordon, 1991). Developing a friendly and supportive relationship with newcomers from the beginning—by inviting them to lunch, introducing them to others in the school, offering to help locate supplies, and so on—goes a long way toward reducing patterns of isolation and building teacher-teacher trust. Principals can support relationship-building between new and returning faculty by creating opportunities throughout the school year for teachers to meet and get to know one another.

Create—and support—meaningful opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively. Too often, schools are structured in ways that prevent teachers from working together closely. Authentic relationships, however, "are fostered by personal conversations, frequent dialogue, shared work, and shared responsibilities. As individuals interact with one another, they tend to listen across boundaries—boundaries erected by disciplines, grade levels, expertise, authority, position, race, and gender" (Lambert, 1998, p. 79). Principals can support collaboration by making time in the schedule for teachers to work together, providing training on effective strategies for team-building, and offering incentives for teachers to collaborate (Blase & Blase, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Uline, Hoy, & Mackley, 2003). Teachers can also seek out opportunities to work with—or simply get to know—teachers in other buildings, content areas, and grades.

Identify ways to increase and/or improve faculty communication. One possibility that requires little additional time for teachers is to set up a faculty Web site. Depending on teachers' interests, the site could be used to host a discussion board about areas of common interest or concern, to report on

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the work of different school committees, to post invitations to social gatherings, to share lesson ideas, to post articles and Web links that may be of interest to other teachers, or simply to exchange information about upcoming activities at school. Providing teachers and other staff training on effective communication skills may be useful, too.

Make relationship-building a priority. As a faculty, select a small but diverse group of teachers to do some initial legwork: locating an assessment tool, measuring teacher-teacher trust in the school, talking to faculty about perceived strengths and areas of concern, and investigating relevant professional development strategies. This information can then be presented to the whole faculty and used to set goals and identify appropriate next steps. (For an example of a school that did just this, see the Whitaker Middle School profile in the Northwest Sampler section of this booklet).

Choose a professional development model that promotes relationship-building. Peer coaching, mentoring, team teaching, professional learning communities, and networking are all models that can be used to strengthen teacher relationships by bringing individuals together around issues of mutual interest and/or concern. Beaverton, Oregon's, Southridge High School, for example, (profiled at the end of this booklet) adopted the Critical Friends Group model to develop trust among staff in a newly-opened school. Whichever model (or models) the faculty chooses, it is important that it not be linked to formal performance evaluation. Mentoring and peer coaching models, for instance, are generally more effective when mentor teachers are not a new staff member's supervisor or department chair (da Costa & Riordan, 1996; Israel, 2003).

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CONCLUSION

Building new relationships, whatever the circumstances, takes time; rebuilding relationships in which trust has been damaged can take far longer (Young, 1998). If we hope to make meaningful, lasting change within school communities, however, identifying increased educator trust as a priority and taking the time to develop it looks to be well worth the investment. "Without trust," as Blase and Blase (2001) write, "a school cannot improve and grow into the rich, nurturing micro-society needed by children and adults alike" (p. 23).

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NORTHWEST SAMPLER

The following Northwest Sampler profiles two Oregon schools that identified trust-building as an important goal. The first, Portland's Whitaker Middle School, recognized lack of trust among staff members as a major obstacle to school improvement and worked successfully to improve it. The second school, Beaverton's Southridge High School, viewed relationship-building as central to establishing norms of collaboration, shared leadership, and shared decisionmaking among an entirely new staff in a new school.

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Location

Whitaker Middle School
5135 NE Columbia Blvd.
Portland, Oregon 97218

Contacts

Lynn Buedefeldt, Principal
Cottrell White, Student Management Specialist
Phone: (503) 916-6470
E-mail: lbuedefeldt@pps.k12.or.us or cwhitejr@pps.k12.or.us

Setting: Urban
Size: 441 students
Student Mix: 47 percent African American, 19 percent Hispanic, 7 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3 percent Native American; 81 percent qualify for the free and reduced-price meals program.

We would like to thank Cottrell White, student management specialist at Whitaker Middle School for sharing his Educational Leadership Project, from which we derived much information for this profile. We would also like to thank White and former Whitaker principal Tom Pickett for sharing their thoughts and experiences about trust and school reform at Whitaker.

Introduction

NWREL is partnering with 15 schools from our region to assist with school improvement efforts and build high-performing learning communities. One partner school,

Whitaker Middle School, has trust building at the heart of its school improvement efforts. The following profile describes how the school used survey data, research, and a Comprehensive School Reform process to start conversations about rebuilding trust by forming a professional learning community.

In Context

In the past few years, the Whitaker school community has had more than its share of challenges. In August 2001, the original school was shut down because of health risks and the sixth-graders were placed in a separate building from the seventh- and eighth-graders. In Fall 2003, all the students were reunited at the current location.

A few years ago an ad hoc group called the Educational Crisis Team chose Whitaker as one of 14 Portland schools they wanted the district to take emergency action to improve. Test scores had been very low, and the 2001–2002 school year saw a 50 percent turnover in staff and three changes of administrators. Negative publicity has also haunted Whitaker. In early November 2002, an article in the local newspaper quoted teachers, students, parents, and administrators blaming each other for the lack of student achievement.

The district climate was negative as well. Declining state income tax revenues had cut state funding to the district by about $28 million dollars. After a state income tax increase ballot measure was voted down, lack of funds threatened to shut Portland Public Schools earlier than scheduled. At the final hour, to avert a teachers' strike, the Portland Teachers

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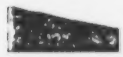

Union bargained with the school district to give up several days of pay to restore some of the lost days to the school year.

School Improvement Efforts

With low student test scores, accompanied by sagging staff morale, the new administrators—Principal Tom Pickett and Assistant Principal Lynn Buedefeldt—were charged with restructuring the school and sought comprehensive strategies to accomplish this task. They led the school through the Title I Schoolwide Planning process, which included a needs assessment, inquiry process into possible solutions to address needs, and designing and integrating solutions into a unified program. Additionally, in Fall 2002 Whitaker became eligible to apply for a U.S. Department of Education Comprehensive School Reform grant (in Oregon, schools that receive a low or unacceptable rating on the Oregon Report Card are eligible to apply through the state). This grant supports the implementation of comprehensive school reforms based on scientifically based research and effective practices.

The required components of a CSR program are strong academic content and research-based strategies, measurable goals, support by and for staff, professional development, parental involvement, technical assistance, evaluation, and allocation of resources. Research on school reform suggests that leadership capacity for school improvement and buy-in from the staff are necessary for undertaking intensive planning and successful implementation of CSR—the school and district must be ready to go through the process (Leithwood, 2002; Schwartzbeck, 2002).

Readiness for school reform had been an obstacle in the past for Whitaker to receive a CSR grant. Because the staff had been so divided on the need for collaboration, said Pickett, the state didn't consider them ready to implement comprehensive school reform.

Schools must demonstrate in a pre-qualification application and during a site visit by the Oregon Department of Education that there is a level of current school improvement efforts, district support for school improvement, leadership capacity (of the principal in particular), and an 80 percent commitment from 95 percent of the total staff. Chris Rhines, a Title I and CSR specialist with the Oregon Department of Education explains, "During our visit [to Whitaker] we outlined the good, the bad, and the ugly of the grant process and then staff completed the survey demonstrating their buy-in to go through such an arduous process." In the survey, staff must agree that:

- School improvement is a focus at the school and most staff members have supported past efforts to improve student achievement
- Leadership roles are shared and there are staff members who are considered key contributors to school improvement efforts
- Their input is valued and that staff members contribute to decisions made
- The staff can overcome and work through any differences and obstacles to the comprehensive school reform model

Whitaker staff scored 84 percent on the survey, and the site visit was very positive. Rhines indicated that strong leadership in their current administration was another positive

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factor in being considered for the grant. The previous vice principal, Buedefeldt is principal for the 2003–2004 school year, and "that continuity is critical," says Rhines.

Even with the positive survey and site visit, Principal Pickett was concerned about the solidity of the vote for CSR. Rhines explains that "after the school receives the grant and starts implementation, the staff must score at least 90 percent on the survey to receive continuation of funding." Additionally, some of the survey responses still indicated a need for improvement in many areas regarding trust and leadership at Whitaker. One respondent indicated that the staff wasn't functioning as a strong team, and there was a level of mistrust among faculty because little time was being spent on careful team building. Another staff person commented that although Whitaker has made a vast improvement, "I question the commitment of the district, staff, and public based on previous efforts."

Project Assessing the Level of Organizational Trust

Concerns about building trust centered around two events that occurred about the same time: the CSR pre-qualification process, and the newspaper article that was so painful for all staff. In spite of the damage that the article caused, Pickett believed that the article served as a catalyst for the entire staff to be willing to discuss issues of trust. He also knew that the trust level in the school and the commitment to the CSR process needed to be strengthened, and he sought ideas for doing this from other staff, in particular Student Management Specialist Cottrell White.

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White, who is enrolled in Portland State University's Secondary Leadership program, needed to conduct an action research project that would have implications for school improvement and/or student achievement—specifically teaching, learning, supervision, and leadership. He became interested in examining and improving the level of organizational trust at Whitaker. "I have always been interested in the role of trust in the process of student learning and achievement," he says. "I have had many discussions [with the principal] about how it feels to be a staff member and what it means to be trusted." When White considered transferring to Whitaker from another school, he "immediately asked ... how I could help be a part of the solution to the academic concerns." He wanted to use research-based practices that indicate building trust leads to staff collaboration and teamwork, which in turn may affect student achievement. Because he had worked with Pickett before in another school, a high level of trust existed between the two—Pickett's trusting White to try new ideas, and White's trust that Pickett would be supportive.

Trust Evaluation Committee

White's project focused on "the keys to raising the trust levels of Whitaker Middle School staff." In December 2002, White invited volunteers to join a "trust evaluation committee." The task for the committee was to "define organizational trust and to make recommendations for the growth of trust at Whitaker." The committee strived to represent the interests of the entire staff and was also open to any staff member at any time. White presented the opportunity for this professional learning team to the entire staff at a Monday night staff meeting and had subsequent conversations with the staff about the parameters of the committee.

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In January 2003, the committee chaired by White was piloted with 10 teachers, one school psychologist, one classified staff member, four support staff members, and seven community volunteers (parents, community-at-large, NWREL staff). Because White has no staff supervisory role, he was well-suited to the role of chair—the staff saw and trusted him as a colleague.

The committee met monthly for five months during which it analyzed the results of several surveys that provided data on trust levels from the entire staff, reviewed the Bryk and Schneider research on trust, and agreed upon Bryk and Schneider's definition of trust, which includes respect, belief in each other's competence, personal regard, integrity, and organizational trust: "the level of trust that exists when a teacher agrees to a practice in the classroom and that the agreed-upon practice will be carried out" (White, p. 9).

Once the committee reviewed the research and data that established trust as important for their school setting, they recommended to the entire staff that two co-facilitators be engaged to work with the entire staff to increase trust in the school, collaboration, and team-building. After the recommendation, the entire staff voted on engaging the facilitators. This vote was 95 percent partial to full support, which was a marked improvement from an informal survey taken earlier in the year, when there was almost no support for having a trust-building process.

Results

At the start of the project, White indicated that staff members were weary of engaging in collaboration and that they tended to work in isolation. However, once they understood

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that collaboration was crucial to school reform, and that they needed to build trust and collaboration to receive the CSR grant, they were much more committed to building trust and working together.

The trust project enabled much movement with the CSR process. In Spring 2003, there was a schoolwide effort to research different CSR models and the entire staff voted on the model they would adopt for their comprehensive school reform. Says White, "The success of the model we chose (Different Ways of Knowing) requires extreme collaboration among the staff," so building trust would have to be an ongoing process throughout the reform process. Inge Aldersebaes, a former NWREL partnership coordinator who had been on the committee, said that one of her roles was to help articulate to the committee and the entire staff the link between building trust and the success of their CSR process. "Your trust committee and the CSR process go hand in hand," emphasized Aldersebaes to the staff, and "there is research to support your trust building efforts."

During the period of the trust project, White noted several improvements in the school climate:

- The staff appeared to work more collaboratively in CSR committee groups (language arts, mathematics/science, behavior)
- Trust was now defined and included in the core values of the strategic plan
- The vote for the CSR grant increased from 84 percent in the pre-qualification application to 95 percent in the final grant submission

- The awareness of the need for organizational trust went from almost no support in an informal survey by the staff to 95 percent on a formal survey.

White acknowledges that much work still needs to be done toward building trust and collaboration for the reform process to succeed. He would like to analyze academic changes in test scores in a future study and recommends the trust study continue for three to five years and facilitators be hired to develop team building for the entire staff. White notes that the new principal Buedefeldt fully supports the trust committee, and plans are being discussed to continue the committee and to hire trust committee facilitators. Both White and Pickett believe that this initial trust building was necessary to get a positive vote on the collaborative school reform model and that the model may be able to act as a "treatment" for the lack of trust in the school, through the model's emphasis on professional learning communities. It is White's opinion that a five-year trust-building process is necessary for the collaborative school reform model, Different Ways of Knowing, to be successful with improving academic achievement.

Keys to Success

- Used survey data to determine levels of trust.

- Used research to gain understanding of how trust was related to collaboration, school improvement, and student performance, and to decide upon a definition of trust.

- Received full support from the administration. Not only did the administration support the project, but provided

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release time for 9-10 committee members to meet and conduct research.

- Communication and involvement between committee and rest of staff: White announced the project to the entire staff, educated the staff about the issue, and had discussions with them about possible parameters. The committee met frequently with small groups of staff at all levels.

- Use of external facilitators to provide a more objective view within an emotionally charged environment. NWREL staff and other external facilitators also provided a global view of comprehensive reform that linked trust to the CSR process.

Conclusion

To an outsider, what has transpired in the last year at Whitaker may not seem like monumental change. Certainly, no one could claim that the trust committee has solved all the problems or increased test scores directly. What has changed, though, is exciting and meaningful: a school staff that had such distrust of school reform and collaboration a year ago, had extremely low morale, had been demoralized by negative press, and had been told by the Oregon State Department of Education that they lacked the capacity for comprehensive reform, came together to discuss the issues of trust and the need for collaboration, and vote to adopt a collaborative school reform model. Says Pickett, "On the final CSR application, staff had a 94 percent vote of support for the CSR plan—this never would have happened if the intervention with the trust committee hadn't occurred."

The challenges that Whitaker faces are not so unusual in high-poverty, low-performing schools. Other schools that

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NWREL has partnered with have also expressed concerns about trust and collaboration. What is inspiring about Whitaker is that the staff did not continue to be mired in negativity but moved forward to begin the process of engaging in reform to improve the academic achievement of the students. Whitaker staff learned that school reform is more than just choosing a model, it is about people making real change and trusting each other to follow through on building change.

(For more information about Oregon's CSR application process see www.ode.state.or.us/iasa/CSR/index.htm and www.goodschools.gwu.edu/pubs/book/may03.html)

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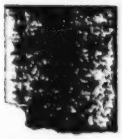

Location

Southridge High School
9625 S.W. 125th Avenue
Beaverton, OR 97008

Contact

Sarah Boly, Principal
Phone: (503) 259-5400
E-mail: sarah_boly@beavton.k12.or.us
Web site: www.beavton.k12.or.us/southridge

Setting: Suburban
Size: 1,950 students
Student mix: 7 percent enrolled in the free and reduced-price lunch program, 4.6 percent receiving English as a Second Language services, and 11 percent receiving Special Education services.

Introduction

Southridge High School is profiled on NWREL's Web site as part of NWREL's Schools Making Progress Series. The series highlights the U.S. Department of Education's Smaller Learning Communities grantees that are making considerable progress toward attaining the benefits of smaller learning communities. Schools receive technical assistance from regional centers coordinated nationally by NWREL.

We chose to highlight Southridge for this *By Request* because of the school faculty's emphasis on creating professional learning communities using Critical Friends Groups, a pro-

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gram developed by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. CFGs provide staff a safe, structured setting of mutual support and honest feedback from trusted peers to work on student learning strategies. In 2002 Southridge was recognized as an Exemplary Smaller Learning Communities Project site by the U.S. Department of Education.

By Request authors thank Sarah Boly for her insights, and Bruce Miller for graciously allowing us to adapt parts of his Schools Making Progress profile. To read the entire profile, visit the Schools Making Progress Series site at www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/descriptions/index.asp

Background

Southridge High School is the newest of five high schools in Beaverton, the third largest school district in Oregon. From its architecture to its modes of communication, the school is designed to promote learning, a sense of community, and shared decisionmaking. This emphasis on relationships—among school staff members, students, parents, and community members—was central to the design and planning of the new high school, a project led by Principal Sarah Boly.

In 1997, Boly formed a planning team of 18 teachers and counselors from across the district who spent a year researching design concepts that explored aspects of school culture, organization, and curriculum and instruction. The school sought prospective employees who shared this commitment and were willing to tolerate ambiguity as practices were developed and implemented in the school's first years of operation. All employees were hired through a review and screening process involving students, parents, and community members.

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The invitation letter to faculty members to be on the planning committee emphasized the active participation of all planning group members. Team members, the letter said, "would have the responsibility for conceptualization of learning communities within the school, for the development of a coherent curriculum ... and have the primary responsibility for the implementation of a substantive professional development program that ensures all staff are prepared to meet their new roles and responsibilities and for the support of school governance and leadership structures."

The planning committee worked closely with the community in the planning process. Through surveys, phone interviews, focus groups, and numerous forums with students, families, and members of the business community and community groups, the following priorities were identified and underlie the core values of the school:

- Personalized learning
- Real-world application of knowledge through contextual learning
- Professional learning communities to promote shared decisionmaking and continuous learning
- Democratic decisionmaking
- Community engagement

After reviewing research findings, attending conferences, visiting schools, and reflecting on how to incorporate the community's goals in a school design, the planning team developed a framework of shared leadership that included strategies, ideas, and programs. Southridge opened in 1999 with shared decisionmaking and mentoring relationships as essential features of life. This is evident in nearly every aspect of its structure and practices, as described below:

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Neighborhoods. Four neighborhoods bring together a cohort of teachers and school staff members with about 475 students. Students are assigned to each neighborhood in heterogeneous groups. Each neighborhood has its own identity and governance structure and functions as a "smaller learning community" under the direction of its neighborhood faculty. Each faculty cohort includes ninth-, tenth-, and eleventh-grade interdisciplinary teams, a counselor, an administrator, and classified support staff. Teachers in teams share responsibility for the curriculum, instruction, evaluation, and sometimes scheduling, and have a shared planning time at the ninth- and tenth-grade levels. Students stay within their assigned neighborhood for all three years of teaming although they may take electives outside their neighborhood. These teams build a sense of community, and help ensure that all students are known well by their teachers who understand their specific learning needs. This enables students to learn more and meet increasingly higher standards.

Advisory program. Teacher advisory programs are at the heart of smaller learning communities. One teacher is assigned to advise 20–25 students during the course of their high school careers, ensuring personalized attention to students' needs. Advisory periods are scheduled each month to deliver a wide range of academic advisement functions such as assisting students to manage their academic plan and profile (MAPP), plan a course of study, assist with career academy contracts, and assist with the management of state testing completion and work sample collection. The advisory periods also help solve school culture issues through the student/staff action democratic process, and serve as a vehicle for accomplishing student-developed diversity awareness and appreciation agendas.

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Skytime. During a 45-minute period twice a week, students can choose to meet with teachers or counselors, complete laboratory activities, or work on projects. The Skytime teacher is also the student's adviser and the student will stay in that mentoring relationship for as long as the student remains at Southridge. This helps ensure that every student is known well by a caring adult in the school.

Link Crew. A transition program for ninth-graders in which 12th-grade students serve as mentors.

Trimester schedule. A trimester schedule makes it possible to offer students more options, more instructional time, while promoting a depth of learning. The district requires students to take 23 credits to graduate; however, Southridge students can take 28 credits, which results in acceleration of learning in many areas.

Depth of learning. All students are required to take advanced study in a career academy (focus area) or be an International Baccalaureate Diploma Candidate to graduate. During their junior or senior year, students will take up to 15 additional courses (some at Portland Community College), and complete career-related learning experiences, 60 hours of service learning, and a senior exhibit, all of which must be tied to their focus area in order to earn an endorsement (Certificate of Advanced Mastery). A commitment to interdisciplinary team teaching, contextual learning, and personalized support for all students supports this priority.

Career academies. Career academies foster mentoring relationships between students and professionals in the community. As sophomores, students choose one to three career

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academy endorsements to follow in their junior and senior years from the areas of science; information technology; business leadership; engineering and design; social, human, and government services; health and related services; and arts and communication.

Demonstrated student learning through exhibition. Students show what they know and can do through such things as senior projects and portfolios.

Critical Friends Groups Focus on Building Trust To Facilitate Collaboration

Because staff members were selected for their willingness to participate in a collaborative school community, there wasn't much worry about staff members being resistant to new ideas. However, bringing a group of teachers and administrators together who had never worked together before had its own share of challenges, says Boly.

Unlike established schools, no one in this group had worked together before, and therefore trust was not necessarily "a given." Regardless of age or experience, most of the teachers were new to team teaching and collaborative decisionmaking processes. Boly frankly admits that even with one year of planning, it was a "chaotic" opening year and she could see that something needed to be done to enable staff members to rise above destructive communication patterns that came from a sense of helplessness and fear. "We had all of these wonderful smaller learning communities in place, but we didn't have staff-to-staff relationships built upon trust. We had a very strong staff who didn't know each other. It was pretty clear that we needed more opportunities for staff to

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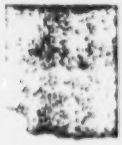

get to know each other and to engage in effective communication around effective teaching practices." Research has shown that students' emotional safety is critical for them to learn. Boly emphasizes that attention to the development of positive staff and student relationships is crucial to creating a culture of mutual trust and respect because "we can't create safe classrooms unless there is trust at every level."

Boly wanted the Southridge whole-school decisionmaking model to be influenced and supported through the protocols being used by the Critical Friends Group Model. She believed that providing the staff with the opportunity to engage in Critical Friends Groups on a regular basis would provide teachers with the emotional safety necessary to holding honest discussions about student work and personal teaching practices. Boly believes that this would in turn, influence the quality of whole-school decisionmaking. In 2001 Southridge applied for and received a U.S. Department of Education Smaller Learning Community Center grant that enabled the school to use the Critical Friends Group model.

Nearly 90 percent of the full-time staff at Southridge participate as members of Critical Friends Groups (CFGs). These professional learning communities focus on the intimacy and vulnerability of teacher practice, helping to build relationships of trust that allow the privacy of practice to emerge into the public light of collegial examination. In each neighborhood, two staff members serve as CFG coaches, facilitating the activities and modeling trust-building behaviors and such protocols as peer observation and feedback. Each CFG consists of about eight staff members, including classified staff who meet once a month. Learning CFG protocols, or codes of behavior, has provided staff mem-

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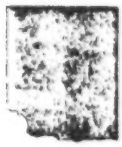


bers with a common language and understanding for coaching and modeling trust-building behaviors, problem solving, giving supportive feedback, and engaging in reflective dialogue. As a result, these protocols have been woven into daily activities at Southridge. Critical Friends Groups have been a crucial strategy at Southridge because the school's goals and visions for learning require that all teachers engage in intense collaborative work.

Shared Decisionmaking

The Critical Friends Groups have enabled a shared decisionmaking process to develop more effectively. Following the lead of planning team members, the entire school staff adopted a shared decisionmaking process that included five action steps:

1. Key issues or problems are identified
2. The staff votes (or reaches consensus) to investigate the issue further
3. An action task force or committee is convened to develop a proposal for action
4. All stakeholders are consulted regarding a draft proposal and are given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and provide both warm and cool feedback
5. The proposal is submitted to the staff for a vote or consensus to adopt or reject the proposal

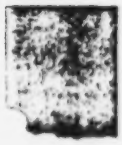
In all group meetings, staff members use a consensus strategy called the "five-finger vote" and protocols associated with the CFG model for structuring discussions. In a five-finger vote, individuals show the degree of their approval with a show of fingers—five being the highest level of

approval and one being the lowest. A closed fist indicates unwillingness to accept the proposal as written and a desire to present a new alternative. At the time a proposal is submitted, staff members and students can ask clarifying and probing questions, and offer warm (positive) and cool (negative) feedback, in that order.

To support shared decisionmaking and ensure that neighborhoods are integrated into the larger context of the whole school, staff members unanimously approved a governance model that includes many committees representing all school community members, including a site council consisting of parents, school staff members, and community members. It serves as school-community liaison on matters of school reform, improvement, and fiscal management of grants.

Results

The dropout rate for the 2001–2002 school year was 3.2 percent, one of the lowest in the state; for the 2002–2003 year, the rate dropped to 1.3 percent from an anticipated 5.8 percent. State assessment results have shown gains in all areas (e.g., in 2003, 77 percent of students met or exceeded standards, up from 45 percent the previous year). Southridge has met Adequate Yearly Progress standards in 60 areas, including Hispanic, African American, IEP, and ELL students. Southridge was named an Exemplary Smaller Learning Communities site by the U.S. Department of Education and has been recognized throughout Oregon for its accomplishments in developing smaller learning communities.



Conclusion

Boly has noticed quite a change from the first year with the Critical Friends Groups having been implemented for three years. One is that staff members feel comfortable laying their issues on the table where they can be discussed. "They can say openly, I feel disrespected," says Boly. "This is how trust is built."

Critical Friends has empowered teachers to make decisions on their own. Vice Principal Amy Gordon reflects, "Empowering people fosters a sense of ownership. Sometimes I hear something I don't want to hear, but the process keeps everyone honest—there is a lot of communication, which is the key."

One might be tempted to dismiss Southridge's accomplishments because the school serves a highly educated community, was designed "from the ground up" with strong community and district support, and staff members were hired based on their common vision of schooling. True, these conditions greatly facilitated success at Southridge, but they are not sufficient. Most important is a leadership approach that empowers others to share in decisionmaking. This is no easy task, of course, but Southridge's path to success can be instructive for other schools seeking to implement smaller learning communities for students and staff members.

Students consistently report in focus groups that Southridge is a positive environment where, according to one pupil, "The power to impact school action, thus the community, has allowed me to express my interests and make a difference." This sentiment is shared by staff and community members, and it was earned through hard work and an abiding vision and expectation about what people can accomplish when they are empowered to make decisions.

APPENDIX: RESEARCH ON TRUST IN SCHOOLS

A Community of Respect, Caring, and Trust: One School's Story
Kratzer (1997) conducted a one-year single-site case study of an urban public elementary school in California that was in the process of restructuring to assess the role of respect, caring, and trust in the school's improvement efforts. The author concludes that "school improvement is contingent upon changing school cultures and patterns of relating, rather than making only structural changes." Although the interviews of teachers and parents reported in this study offer valuable insights into the school improvement process, connections drawn between school improvement and trust in the study are not supported by hard data.

A Multidisciplinary Analysis of the Nature, Meaning, and Measurement of Trust
Tschannen and Hoy's (2000) multidisciplinary review draws on the theoretical and empirical literature on trust spanning the past four decades. The literature is of a wide variety of methodologies from experimental studies and surveys to interviews and longitudinal case studies. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy explore the importance of trust in schools, the nature and meaning of trust, and the dynamics of trust, and synthesize the literature on trust as it relates to organizational processes such as communication, collaboration, climate, organizational citizenship, efficacy, and effectiveness.

Successful Texas Schoolwide Programs: Research Study Results, School Profiles, Voices of Practitioners and Parents
Lein, Johnson, and Ragland (1997) conducted a study of

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more than 50 high-poverty Texas schools that scored high in reading and math on state achievement tests. Using case study data from 26 of the schools, the researchers identified seven common themes of high-performing Title I schools: focus on the academic success of every student, no excuses, careful experimentation, inclusion of everyone in problem solving, sense of family, collaboration and trust, and passion for learning and growing. The study results were then used to develop a self-study and planning guide for other schools to use in developing school improvement plans.

Teacher Efficacy and the Capacity to Trust
Da Costa and Riordan (1996) examined connections between "teachers' sense of efficacy and their willingness to engage in a work-focused, trusting, professional relationship with colleagues." The study was based on interviews and conference transcripts from 10 pairs of teachers from three urban Canadian elementary schools. The researchers conclude that "increasing confidence enables teachers to allow fellow teachers to observe them, while less confident teachers have a harder time entering into this trusting relationship."

Trust in Schools: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis
Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) conducted an empirical study of relationships between faculty trust, school climate, and the authenticity of principal and teacher behavior. The study was based on surveys of 2,741 teachers from 86 middle schools in a northeastern state. Although the sample of schools was not random, measures were taken to include schools from urban, suburban, and rural areas as well as all socioeconomic levels in the state. The researchers concluded that "aspects of climate and authenticity are related differentially to faculty trust. Trust in the principal is determined

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primarily by the behavior of the principal" while trust among teachers is "determined by the behavior of teachers in relation to one another" (p. 348). This suggests that "trust requires a direct connection between actors" (p. 349). Principals can foster professional environments for faculty, but teacher relationships to one another are primarily determined by the actions of teachers themselves.

Trust: The Quality Required for Successful Management

Blake and MacNeil (1998) examined how best to build trust in schools through a survey of 129 teachers enrolled in education administration about their perceptions of principals' competencies and behavior. The correlation of trust to 17 competency items showing the highest relationship were "is knowledgeable about what the school should do for students, is approachable, uses power effectively, analyzes problems effectively, and is flexible." A factor analysis was done to determine what factors really accounted for the development of trust. The factors that were determined most important in developing trust were principals being kind toward people, presenting themselves in a cheerful manner, patience, thoughtful of other's feelings, respectful, friendly, and approachable. Additional recommendations for principals to build trust based on the data are to supervise and evaluate teachers in a competent manner, demonstrate comprehensive evaluation strategies before making judgments, create useful staff development opportunities, and help develop appropriate curriculum solutions for student achievement.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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This book shows educators how to sustain school improvement by helping the staff function as a professional learning community. Learn how schools establish a professional community where teachers are committed to ongoing study, constant practice, and mutual cooperation. Discover the essential building blocks of effective schools and explore ways to sustain change efforts through better communication and collaboration. Includes examples of successful change models and vision statements from various schools.

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Smaller Learning Communities Program

NWREL's Serving Smaller Learning Communities Project (www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/index.shtml)

U.S. Department of Education Smaller Learning Community Program (www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/HS/SLCP/)

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Critical Friends Groups Resources

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NSRF program has developed learning communities and extended networks that incorporate the concept of Critical Friendship. Skilled facilitators/coaches help teachers and administrators create and/or sustain learning communities where they can develop shared norms and values, engage in reflective dialogue, give each other feedback on their work, and hold each other accountable.

Trust Scales

Wayne K. Hoy and Megan Tschannen-Moran's Trust Scales can be downloaded and used to measure trust in your school at www.coe.ohio-state.edu/whoy/instruments_6.htm# The%20T and http://mxtsch.people.wm.edu/researchtools.html.

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